



## Core Seminar

### How to Grow

### Class 12: Cultivating Spiritual Fruit (Part 2)

---

#### I. Introduction:

Today we are going to attempt to complete our study of how we can work to cultivate spiritual fruit in our lives—particularly the fruit Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23. To refresh us, can someone remind us of what we mean when we say "spiritual fruit." What is it?

That's right, when we say "spiritual fruit," we are talking about the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a Christian. We have in mind those unique characteristics that we do not possess naturally but which the Holy Spirit works out in us as we follow hard after Christ. Let's read Galatians 5:22-23 together again:

#### Galatians 5:22-23

**22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Last week, in our brief overview of the book of Galatians, we were reminded that we are indeed saved by grace alone. We were reminded that even our good works are ultimately the product of God's indwelling Spirit. While those things are true, we are still called to play an active role in working to cultivate these spiritual fruits. John Sanderson, author of the book *The Fruit of the Spirit*, says:

Physical fruit grows because it is produced by a living plant; it may even grow when it is unattended. The analogy for the Christian life cannot be pressed. The Christian is a new creature, a branch on the vine; yet he is responsible for taking an active part in the producing of fruit. The Bible knows nothing of wild fruit in the area of Christian sanctification.

So, armed with this understanding that our role in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit is an active one, let's dive back in to Galatians 5:22, and we'll begin where we left off, with "kindness."

#### I. Kindness

Biblical kindness is not being nice and helpful towards other people *for the purpose of gaining your own ends*. Now, we can treat other people with kindness in order to manipulate them. Have you ever complemented someone in the prideful hope of getting one in return? Have you ever given someone a gift in the hopes that they would, in response, have a higher opinion of you?

There are many biblical examples of this kind of false kindness. What about Jacob's "kindness" in fixing his brother Esau some stew? What could be more kind than sharing your meal with your famished older brother – right? But God's Word clearly reveals Jacob's heart – he wanted Esau's birthright. And he got it, in exchange for a bowl of stew.

Satan was no stranger to such false kindness. We see this when he was tempting Jesus in the desert, as recorded in Luke 4:5-7. Satan offered Jesus the worship of the whole world. But there was a condition,

Jesus would first have to worship him. Satan used kindness, or at least the veneer of it, to try to manipulate the Son of God for his own gain.

Biblical kindness is the exact opposite. It is the extension of benevolence to people who may or may not be kind or loving or even considerate in return. The word “kindness” is not often used in the New Testament, but the Greek root of the word relates to “benevolence” and “usefulness.” So, we can confidently say that being kind, biblically, means to show self~~less~~ness. Biblical kindness has the aim of looking out for and seeking to do good to others, not ourselves.

Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. We see in that story an incredible lack of kindness shown by a priest and a Levite. They walk right past the man in need. "What can he do for us? Not much," that's the internal dialogue their actions seem to suggest. The Samaritan, on the other hand, was moved by compassion to *do something* to aid the injured man. The Samaritan *acted*, and not out of any motivation to gain anything personally. This is true kindness that pleases God.

Our God is perfectly kind. We see in the gospel. He looked down on an entire race lost in sin and rebellion, and decided to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from eternal destruction at great cost to Himself. Jesus died on the cross in our place. Jesus was completely selfless in denying Himself for us. Paul speaks of God's saving kindness in Titus 3:4-5, saying:

**Titus 3:4-5**

**4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit[.]

So how can we cultivate kindness? Well, to be kind, we must be humble. Prideful men consider others less valuable. They won't stoop down to extend the sort of selfless service we've been considering. A prideful person doesn't resemble Jesus, who humbled Himself in order to show infinite kindness even to His enemies.

Also, to be kind, we must **avoid spiritual individualism**. Yes, we are saved as individuals, through faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. But, this salvation makes us a part of the church, the eternal body of Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:

**1 Corinthians 12:24-25**

**24** [W]hich our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, **25** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

There's no biblical category for Christian loners. We have been gifted as individual believers to serve one another with kindness. And as believers, we should also show kindness to the unbelieving world by witnessing to the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, to cultivate the fruit of kindness, study your own sin. Meditate on the kindness God has shown you in Christ and let this destroy your prideful self-centeredness. Pray, and ask God to turn your heart outwards towards others in true, Christ-like kindness.

## II. Goodness

Biblical goodness is not merely the appearance of being good, all the while harboring evil desires underneath. Biblical goodness is not hypocritical. God has made it abundantly clear that He hates fakery, putting on airs, effrontery, all of that. In the first chapter of Isaiah God condemns His people Israel for their unfaithfulness to Him. He says this to them...

**Isaiah 1:13-14**

**13** Bring no more vain offerings;  
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—  
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

**14** Your new moons and your appointed feasts  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me;  
I am weary of bearing them.

In the New Testament, we have an example of false goodness in the tale of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:3-5. This husband and wife sold some property and gave a portion of the proceeds to the church. But, in their hypocritical desire to appear good, they claimed to have given away *all* of the proceeds. Peter informed them that they had lied to God, and they both literally dropped dead.

God's open hatred of false goodness ought to drive us to ask how we play the hypocrite in our own lives. Do we choose what church ministries to be a part of based on how public they are? When we evangelize or serve, do our hearts veer towards considering how such activities will build our spiritual resume? Do we think we're more "good" if our devotional times are longer than those of our friends?

So, what is authentically Christian goodness? It is the pursuit of moral beauty in our desires and actions. Goodness is a lot like the biblical category of righteousness. The theologian Tom Schreiner, has written about this: "Those who have the Spirit of God are strengthened to live lives of moral beauty, and their decency shines forth in a world blighted by evil."

The biblical concept of "good" carries two main connotations – the first is "faultless," and the second means "outgoing." The prophet Daniel is an excellent example of the "faultless" aspect of goodness. His enemies tried to find something, anything that they could use to drag Daniel down. But we read in Daniel 6:4,

**Daniel 6:4**

Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.

Daniel's interest was in pleasing God, not man. In this sense, he was faultless. We should pray that we would all lead such good lives, that the enemies of God would find no hypocrisy in us. We should pray that they would, in spite of themselves, be forced to admit that Christ is indeed making us good by His Spirit.

But, goodness also connotes an outgoing spirit. One who *is* good, *does* good. It is not a heart condition only. God Himself, who is the perfection of goodness, acts on His goodness. In Luke 6:35, Jesus says:

**Luke 6:35**

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

One excellent way to cultivate goodness is to regularly be in the business of stirring up your affection for what is true, what is beautiful, and ultimately good. Scripture memorization can be especially helpful for this. If you are hiding the Word in your heart it will bear the fruit of goodness in your life.

Another excellent way to cultivate goodness is be willing to accept admonishment and rebuke. We are often unaware of our own sin. And as prideful sinners, we don't like having our sin pointed out to us by those who *do* see it. But, if we truly desire to grow in goodness, we must be willing to hear and receive correction. In Romans 15:14, Paul, talking to apparently mature believers, says this:

**Romans 15:14**

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Believers in Jesus Christ ought to be able and willing to speak to one another about the sin in their lives. Pray that you too would be willing, in all humility and love, to point out evil in the life of your fellow believers in order to help them grow in goodness. And pray that you'd be willing to hear and accept admonishment as the loving act of a brother or sister in Christ who wants to see God's goodness shine in your life even more.

### **III. Faithfulness**

Unfaithfulness is best defined as disobedience toward God. Often in Scripture we see this connection between disobedience and unfaithfulness, such as in this passage in 1 Chronicles:

**1 Chronicles 10:13**

So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance.

Open disobedience is obviously a lack of faithfulness. But, perhaps more common among Christians is a half-heartedness in our obedience. We obey but only in part. Or we obey but begrudgingly. We see God's response to such unfaithfulness in the book of Malachi. God's people were bringing Him half-hearted sacrifices – and God says this to them:

**Malachi 1:8**

When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

We know the answer. So, how would such unfaithfulness show itself in our lives? How about in putting off a project at work or a paper at school, then scrambling to do it the night before and handing in shoddy work? How about a parent who sometimes chooses not to discipline his child because it doesn't seem to be having any effect, or because she's too tired? Or the church member who smiles and waves at everyone on Sunday, but never really takes the time to get to know or to serve anyone?

To be faithful is to be loyal and dependable, to be someone people can count on to do what you are supposed to do. Biblical faithfulness is a determination to persevere in following God's Word wholeheartedly, even if it costs our financial well-being or reputation.

Doesn't this definition of faithfulness find its perfect example in Jesus Himself? He believed every word of His Heavenly Father was true and to be obeyed. And He persevered in following His Heavenly Father's commands, all the way to the cross. Jesus knew that faithfulness to God would cost him life, yet he said...

**Luke 22:42**

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

We are called to faithfulness because the God in whose image we are made is Himself perfectly faithful. In *Psalm 89:2*, the psalmist says, "*For I said, 'Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.'*" God's faithfulness is perfect. He always keeps His promises, always fulfills what He says He will do. This is the true faithfulness we are called to exhibit.

We can cultivate faithfulness by meditating on Scripture. You can't be faithful to God if you don't know what He calls you to do and to be. Meditating on Scripture reminds us of God's faithfulness to us. We have so many of God's already-fulfilled promises to read about in the Bible – these should give us heart, should lead us to trust and obey Him in response.

Another motivator of faithfulness? Christ's imminent return. In Matthew 24 Jesus says this:

**Matthew 24:45-46**

**45** "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? **46** Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

If we are expectantly awaiting the return of Jesus, we will want to be found faithfully serving Him when He returns, which could be at any moment.

#### **IV. Gentleness**

I think sometimes when we think of things that are gentle, we think of fluffy pillows and bunny-rabbits. But is God's economy, gentleness is not synonymous with weakness or a lack of courage and strength.

Like the other fruits of the Spirit, we can possess a false gentleness. A gentleness which seeks to avoid conflict at all costs. Nor is gentleness false modesty or self-depreciation. Biblically speaking, however, "gentleness" and "meekness" (or humility) mean much the same thing. Both have to do with the ideas of great power being exercised with great restraint and great care.

In the Old Testament, we have a man who is actually singled out for his meekness, Moses. "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth," we read in Numbers 12:3. This description of Moses as meek comes in the context of his being in a position of strength, of leadership.

And it's worth noting that just before this description of Moses, we're told that his position of authority was under attack by his own brother and sister. Biblical gentleness assumes great power, but this power is not used in self-defense. Rather, gentleness defers judgment to God. We then choose to respond in a quiet, humble manner, consistent with an understanding of who we are in Christ, and of who God is.

Jesus is the personification of true gentleness. Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus included this tender, gentle description:

**Isaiah 42:2-3**

**2** He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
**3** a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.

And, Peter reminds us that we see the meekness of Jesus preeminently at the cross, in the gospel, in 1 Peter 2:23:

**1 Peter 2:23**

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Biblical gentleness assumes great strength, but this strength is never used harshly, violently, or aggressively. Instead, it is used to protect the weak, to serve the most helpless. Doesn't God treat us with such gentleness in Christ, gently restoring us every time we repent of sin and seek His forgiveness? Praise God that we have a Savior God who described Himself as meek and lowly in heart.

One way we can cultivate gentleness? Again, by meditating on God's Word, and in particular on verses that teach about how we should view other people. For example, in Matthew 12:12, Jesus says that man is far more valuable than sheep. That's encouraging. But the point is this: our fellow humans are made in God's image, and it is for sinners just like them, and like us, that Christ died for on the cross. Because of these truths, the people we meet each day are immensely valuable. We as believers should treat them gently, with great care, and not with sharpness and harsh words or attitudes.

## **VI. Self-Control**

Self-control is a loaded term. But when the Bible speaks of self-control, it isn't talking about willpower – gritting our teeth, putting our head down, and doing whatever it takes. I'm sure that most of us here have at one time or another attempted to make changes in our lives via this method – and, if you're like me, it probably hasn't worked out on a consistent basis (or if you're really like me, you've probably failed miserably).

Nor is biblical self-control merely trading in a sin for a solution that's less than the Spirit-empowered ideal that God offers us. Say you struggle with anger, with getting physically violent when things don't go your way. And say you get convicted of it and rather than lashing out physically, you start to retaliate verbally when you get slighted. Not a punch against the wall, a muffled cuss word barked under your breath. This kind of replacing a sin with another sin, that's not what we're talking about here. That's not Spirit-wrought self-control.

John Sanderson says, “There is a sort of self-control that can reject a particular sinful act; but if that self-control refuses the grace of God, the result is really only trading one sin for another.” Ultimately, trying to “do it ourselves” is a rejection of God’s offer of a life based on His grace, His resources. This is offensive to Him, because it doesn’t see His way is best.

So what is biblical self-control? It’s restraint from the evil desires of the flesh for the glory of God.

Once we come to Christ in faith, we are given a new, preeminent goal in life: to glorify God. And, we are given the Holy Spirit, which can empower us to pursue that end successfully. Now we actually have the ability to exercise self-control, to choose what is objectively *best* in every situation – the glory of God.

One example of such Spirit-empowered self-control is in Acts 23, where Paul comes under interrogation by the Sanhedrin. An official unjustly orders a guard to slap him. In response, Paul says, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!” In that situation, Paul had every reason to be angry, and telling the official that his holiness was merely external was actually an accurate assessment. But then, someone points out to Paul that it was the *high priest* he was yelling at. And then, Paul instantly submits himself to God’s Word, saying:

**Acts 23:5**

And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’ ”

In the midst of an unfair trial, the possibility of being lynched by an angry mob, and the injustice of his being struck, it’s amazing that Paul was able instantly to bring to mind God’s Word, to control his emotions and to apologize. We are all sinners, and so was Paul. But we should appreciate the fact that as soon as Paul heard the voice of God through His Word, he reigned himself in and obeyed.

Paul also speaks of this kind of self-control in 1 Corinthians 9, drawing an analogy between the Christian life and training for an athletic event. Athletes train themselves as rigorously as they do for a reason – they want to win the prize. Paul says this:

**1 Corinthians 9:25**

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

As believers, the prize we are running towards is the final salvation of our souls and the perfection of our joy at the return of Jesus Christ. If this truly is our highest goal, we will desire all other things less, and so will by the power of the Holy Spirit be able to control ourselves when tempted by any lesser things.

To cultivate self-control, we need to first and foremost be cultivating your relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you talking with God in prayer? Are you depending on Him daily by faith? Are you more and more in awe of Christ’s beauty? Do you have a relationship with your Savior?

Also, we must never believe the lie that self-control is out of the question in certain situations or areas of our lives. If you are a Christian, then you have living in you the same Holy Spirit that Scripture tells us raised Jesus from the dead. Surely this Spirit can also help you to restrain your anger. Sure He can help

you say no to lust, to gluttony, to anxiety, or to despair. Surely He can empower you to obey God even in those areas that are most naturally difficult for you.

## **VII. Conclusion**

We surely have work to do in this process of growing in fruitfulness – after all, this class is about cultivating the fruit of the Spirit, and cultivation can be hard work! But never forget that it is ultimately the fruit *of the Spirit* – so, never forget to go to God and ask Him to be at work in your hearts, growing you in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Pray regularly that God would *fill* you with His Spirit, that the fruit He desires would overflow in you.

## **CLOSING QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS**